



Crime prevention in hot spots

*The results and experiences from
two projects targeting muggings and assault*

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Summary

This report looks at two projects carried out by the police in Stockholm and Södermanland in collaboration with the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå). The project primarily concerns crime prevention initiatives targeting muggings in Stockholm and open-air assault in Eskilstuna. The point of departure was the potential in both cities to concentrate crime prevention initiatives to specific locations, known as hot spots, for the offence in question. Brå's role in this context was to provide methodological support – in the sense of assisting the various police authorities in the choice of initiatives and working methods based on available research – and to evaluate the outcomes of the projects. The police was responsible for designing the project's organisational framework, developing initiatives and implementing these. In both cases the project duration was one year.

The purpose of the projects was to reduce the crime rate in the two cities. In a larger perspective, it is also Brå's hope that the report will contribute to stimulating the police to invest in crime prevention initiatives with a clearer scientific basis.

The projects were based on current research

The available research on police crime prevention essentially indicates that potentially effective initiatives are those that are based on underlying problems and which target risk factors. They should also focus on specific offences and be proactive in nature. The current state of research is not such that it is easy to develop and implement standard solutions from it, but it may be used for guidance when selecting possible methods based on the present situation. In light of this, Brå has decided to focus its methodological support, in the context of these projects, on helping the police to develop initiatives that target existing problems and which have a clear notion of crime prevention. The work was carried out based on the SARA model¹ and two different tools have been used to clarify the link between initiative and intended impact in terms of crime prevention: the problem analysis triangle or “crime triangle”, and a group of techniques for situational crime prevention.

Description of the problem

The data used to develop initiatives is based on an analysis of reported offences of the aforementioned types in the two cities over a period of three years. The starting point is an analysis of the offences committed in identified hot spots – locations which account for a relatively large proportion of the reported offences – in the two cities. In Stockholm, there are seven such locations where around a quarter of the reported muggings take place. In Eskilstuna there are three, where around a third of the reported cases of open-air assault occur. Each location has a radius of around 90 metres.

In Stockholm, muggings are most common in the late evening and at night. The perpetrators often work in groups and the offence is almost exclusively committed by men. A very high proportion the perpetrators are young; half are estimated to be under the age of 22. In most cases, the victim is also a young man but, unlike the perpetrators, is most often alone when the offence is committed. The usual scenario is that the perpetrator makes contact with the victim and verbally expresses their wishes. Violence is relatively common and occurs in around 60 per cent of cases. It is less common for the victim to be threatened with a weapon; this happens in about a third of cases. In such cases, the victim is usually threatened with a knife or other pointed weapon. The most common spoils of muggings are mobile phones.

In Eskilstuna, the assaults normally take place on late evenings and at night on three days of the week: Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The most usual case by far is that the assault takes place outside a pub or night club and is linked to the consumption of alcohol. Both perpetrator and victim are in most cases young men. Furthermore, in most cases, at least where young person are involved, both

¹ SARA is an acronym for *scanning, analysis, response* and *assessment*, which are the different stages of this model for problem-oriented working methods. The model itself is explained in greater detail in the report.

the perpetrator and the victim are together with friends at the time of the assault. In a quarter of reported cases, the victim and perpetrator are previously acquainted. If physical violence is involved, it is a matter of blows in most cases, and it is very uncommon for weapons to be used.

Police initiatives in the two cities

In Stockholm, a special committee for muggings, a *personrånskommission*, was established to carry out initiatives targeting muggings. The committee consists of an investigative group and a group on patrol duty. In the crime prevention perspective, the initiatives have exclusively targeted perpetrators, with the overall goal of hampering the possibility to commit an offence and increasing the perceived risk of detection. The main work has consisted of targeted patrolling in hot spots during the days and times when these offences are most commonly committed. Other initiatives have involved identifying serial crime and searching for key persons. Where investigative initiatives are concerned, there have been changes in approach in terms of creating procedures to ensure that relevant investigative initiatives are carried out. This is intended both to identify perpetrators in cases where there are no suspects and to inquire into suspects' involvement. In the majority of cases, photographic evidence has been requested and more in-depth analyses of this have been carried out. New methods of tracking mobile telephones and facilitating continuous analysis of reported offences have also been used, with the purpose of detecting serial crime at an early stage.

In Eskilstuna, the project has largely been run by a project manager tasked with ensuring the initiatives being carried out within the scope of the existing activities. In the crime prevention perspective, the police in Eskilstuna have primarily worked with initiatives targeting the locations where the assaults take place. The work has been focused on pubs and the persons working there: owners, security guards and serving staff, as well as the environment outside of the pubs, where there has been a good deal of collaboration with the municipality in order to rectify perceived problems. The police work targeted at the pubs has been primarily intended to reduce the incidence of over-serving alcohol. This has included undercover pub monitoring and increased supervision for security guards in their practical work.

Initially, the intention was also for the project in Eskilstuna to involve an investigation of the reported incidences of open-air assault, but this element was dropped when the project commenced.

Implementation

On the whole, many of the planned initiatives in both Stockholm and Eskilstuna have been carried out as intended. The initiative that the police found most difficult to carry out was the targeted patrols in Stockholm. The greatest difficulty by far was establishing a sufficient level of patrolling on the days and at the times when muggings are most frequent, i.e., evenings and nights, Fridays and Saturdays.

During the course of the project, the patrol group, which consisted of six police officers, worked around 40 per cent of all weekend nights, i.e., between three and four per month. It is primarily a combination of two different factors that has contributed to the number of weekend shifts worked not being any higher. One is the decision to work in full groups. This is due to the belief that a better job can be done with greater numbers. The other factor is that the working-hour agreement of the City police only requires an individual to work four weekend nights within a six-week period.

It has also proven to be somewhat problematic to implement the strategy with many short visits per hotspot and shift. The number of targeted patrols per shift has varied between one and fifteen, with an average of six per shift. The average time per visit was around 25 minutes. This meant a total of around two and a half hours per shift were spent at the hot spots. It is also a strong contributing factor that most shifts have been carried out as a whole group, though there are other causes. There have for example been a number of practical problems as a result of inadequate internal establishment of the project. This is a result of not having access to certain important resources beforehand, such as vehicles, laptops and a specific radio channel; on many occasions the officers had to arrange this themselves at the start of the shift. The group states that for a number of shifts it has taken almost one hour to arrange for a vehicle. In addition, part of the time is spent registering information in various registers, such as when making arrests or confiscating objects.

Cautious optimism about the results

Brå is cautiously optimistic about the results of the crime prevention work in both Stockholm and Eskilstuna. Both projects have coincided with a reduction in reported offences. There are, however, both indications supporting and indications disproving the notion that the initiatives have affected the crime rate. What mostly seems to disprove the claim is that the reduced number of offences of the studied types seems to have been a general trend across the country during that period. What supports the claim is that the number reported offences, as far as can be seen, have fallen in line with what was expected based on the formulation of the initiatives.

In Stockholm, the number of

- muggings has fallen more in the indicated hot spots than elsewhere in the city
- the reduction apparently occurring among young people
- the decrease of young persons involved in muggings appears to be more extensive in Stockholm than in other metropolitan areas.

Furthermore, there has not previously been a strong connection between Stockholm and the rest of the country in terms of the development of reported muggings over time.

In Eskilstuna,

- the incidence of assaults decreased in hot spots, but not elsewhere in the city
- the reduction occurred exclusively during times when the incidences of violence can be linked to nightlife
- the security guards' responses to a survey indicate a connection between a reduction in over-serving, lower levels of drunkenness and a decrease in the amount of violence.

In addition, the violence in Eskilstuna is decreasing in accordance with a pattern that differs from that of the country as a whole.